

INTERNATIONAL CITY MANAGERS' ASSOCIATION
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METHODS OF FILING CORRESPONDENCE

What is the best method of filing correspondence in the city manager's office?

The basic file should have letters arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent or by name of the company or organization which he represents. All correspondence is filed by the name of the individual except letters from individuals about company matters, which should be alphabetized by the name of the company because the company name is more important and more easily remembered, and because this system groups together related correspondence which may be written by different employees of the concern. The other two common methods of filing (geographically and by subject) are not well adapted to a city manager's office. A geographic file is not suitable because there is little need of locating letters according to the name of the city, and a subject file--except for supplementary use--is undesirable because a cross-index is required to find letters from individuals.

The mechanics of the file are simple. Behind the separators for each letter of the alphabet a general folder is maintained for all names beginning with that letter. Following this general folder are individual folders with the names of persons or companies with whom there are more than four or five pieces of correspondence and whose names begin with that letter of the alphabet. Within the general folder, the arrangement is alphabetical and chronological so that all the letters from one individual or company lie together in the order in which they were answered. Thus, in the general folder in the "A" file would be found first the three letters from Mr. Aaron, in chronological order, followed by the two letters to the Abbey Company, etc. Whenever, four or five letters to one person have accumulated, they should be removed to an individual folder where they should be maintained in chronological order.

In all cases, of course, carbon copies of answers to letters are clipped or stapled to the front of the original letter or typed on the back of the original. For uniformity, some standard rules of alphabetizing should be adopted as there are numerous variations and special cases. Any standard text on filing contains suitable rules. The particular system used is relatively unimportant as long as uniformity is maintained.

This alphabetic file should be supplemented in certain cases by chronological subject files. For example, if a sewage disposal plant is being constructed, it is desirable to have filed together in chronological order all the correspondence about the sewage disposal plant. This will necessitate placing in a "Sewage Disposal Plant" subject file (entirely independent of the alphabetic file) certain letters which would ordinarily go into the alphabetic file. However, so that the alphabetic file will be a complete reference file for all correspondence, some notation should be placed in the appropriate order in the alphabetic file indicating the location of any letter filed elsewhere. Thus, in alphabetic order in this one file will be found every letter or a cross-reference to it which will permit its being found instantly.

Probably the simplest way of providing a notation for letters not in the alphabetic file is to prepare a form on cheap letter-size colored stock which would

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have mimeographed on it, with appropriate blanks to be filled in: "Letter From or To:", "Address:", "Date:", "Is Filed:." This sheet should be filled out completely and filed alphabetically in the exact place that the letter it refers to would be filed ordinarily. These same forms may be used for noting that a letter from any file has been temporarily removed. Such a special form could have the information mimeographed on it several times on both sides and could then be re-used until the sheet had been filled on both sides. Letters filed in subject files ultimately would be returned to the alphabetic file when there was no longer any need of the subject file.

For correspondence and memorandums with subordinate administrative officers, a separate file may be maintained for each department head and division head. Ordinarily all correspondence with these persons will be placed in this file, it really being a continuation of the alphabetic file. Here again, for any letter filed in a subject file, there should be a cross-reference notation placed in the file.